

CHAPTER XXIX

RIGHT THINKING AND PERSONALITY

Whatever crushes individuality is despotism, by whatever name it may be called.—JOHN STUART MILL, *On Liberty*.

Right thinking fits for complete living by developing the power to appreciate the beautiful in nature and art, power to think the true and to will the good, power to live the life of thought, and faith, and hope, and love.

—N. C. SCHAEFFER, *Thinking and Learning to Think*.

The speaker's most valuable possession is personality—that indefinable, imponderable something which sums up what we are, and makes us different from others; that distinctive force of self which operates appreciably on those whose lives we touch. It is personality alone that makes us long for higher things. Rob us of our sense of individual life, with its gains and losses, its duties and joys, and we grovel. "Few human creatures," says John Stuart Mill, "would consent to be changed into any of the lower animals for a promise of the fullest allowance of a beast's pleasures; no intelligent human being would consent to be a fool, no instructed person would be an ignoramus, no person of feeling and conscience would be selfish and base, even though he should be persuaded that the fool, or the dunce, or the rascal is better satisfied with his lot than they with theirs. . . . It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied, better to be a Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool or the pig is of a different opinion, it is only because they know only their own side of the question. The other party to the comparison knows both sides."

Now it is precisely because the Socrates type of person lives on the plan of right thinking and restrained feeling and willing that he prefers his state

to that of the animal. All that a man is, all his happiness, his sorrow, his achievements, his failures, his magnetism, his weakness, all are in an amazingly large measure the direct results of his thinking. Thought and heart combine to produce *right* thinking: “As a man thinketh in his heart so is he.” As he does not think in his heart so he can never become.

Since this is true, personality can be developed and its latent powers brought out by careful cultivation. We have long since ceased to believe that we are living in a realm of chance. So clear and exact are nature’s laws that we forecast, scores of years in advance, the appearance of a certain comet and foretell to the minute an eclipse of the Sun. And we understand this law of cause and effect in all our material realms. We do not plant potatoes and expect to pluck hyacinths. The law is universal: it applies to our mental powers, to morality, to personality, quite as much as to the heavenly bodies and the grain of the fields. “Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap,” and nothing else.

Character has always been regarded as one of the chief factors of the speaker’s, power. Cato defined the orator as *vir bonus dicendi peritus*—a good man skilled in speaking. Phillips Brooks says: “Nobody can truly stand as an utterer before the world, unless he be profoundly living and earnestly thinking.” “Character,” says Emerson, “is a natural power, like light and heat, and all nature cooperates with it. The reason why we feel one man’s presence, and do not feel another’s is as simple as gravity. Truth is the summit of being: justice is the application of it to affairs. All individual natures stand in a scale, according to the purity of this element in them. The will of the pure runs down into other natures, as water runs down from a higher into a lower vessel. This natural force is no more to be withstood than any other natural force. . . . Character is nature in the highest form.”

It is absolutely impossible for impure, bestial and selfish thoughts to blossom into loving and altruistic habits. Thistle seeds bring forth only the thistle. Contrariwise, it is entirely impossible for continual altruistic,

sympathetic, and serviceful thoughts to bring forth a low and vicious character. Either thoughts or feelings precede and determine all our actions. Actions develop into habits, habits constitute character, and character determines destiny. Therefore to guard our thoughts and control our feelings is to shape our destinies. The syllogism is complete, and old as it is it is still true.

Since “character is nature in the highest form,” the development of character must proceed on natural lines. The garden left to itself will bring forth weeds and scrawny plants, but the flower-beds nurtured carefully will blossom into fragrance and beauty.

As the student entering college largely determines his vocation by choosing from the different courses of the curriculum, so do we choose our characters by choosing our thoughts. We are steadily going up toward that which we most wish for, or steadily sinking to the level of our low desires. What we secretly cherish in our hearts is a symbol of what we shall receive. Our trains of thoughts are hurrying us on to our destiny. When you see the flag fluttering to the South, you know the wind is coming from the North. When you see the straws and papers being carried to the Northward you realize the wind is blowing out of the South. It is just as easy to ascertain a man’s thoughts by observing the tendency of his character.

Let it not be suspected for one moment that all this is merely a preachment on the question of morals. It is that, but much more, for it touches the whole man—his imaginative nature, his ability to control his feelings, the mastery of his thinking faculties, and—perhaps most largely—his power to will and to carry his volitions into effective action

Right thinking constantly assumes that the will sits enthroned to execute the dictates of mind, conscience and heart. *Never tolerate for an instant the suggestion that your will is not absolutely efficient.* The way to will is to will—and the very first time you are tempted to break a worthy resolution—and you will be, you may be certain of that—*make your fight then and*

there. You cannot afford to lose that fight. You *must* win it—don't swerve for an instant, but keep that resolution if it kills you. It will not, but you must fight just as though life depended on the victory; and indeed your personality may actually lie in the balances!

Your success or failure as a speaker will be determined very largely by your thoughts and your mental attitude. The present writer had a student of limited education enter one of his classes in public speaking. He proved to be a very poor speaker; and the instructor could conscientiously do little but point out faults. However, the young man was warned not to be discouraged. With sorrow in his voice and the essence of earnestness beaming from his eyes, he replied: "I will not be discouraged! I want so badly to know how to speak!" It was warm, human, and from the very heart. And he did keep on trying—and developed into a creditable speaker.

There is no power under the stars that can defeat a man with that attitude. He who down in the depths of his heart earnestly longs to get facility in speaking, and is willing to make the sacrifices necessary, will reach his goal. "Ask and ye shall receive; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you," is indeed applicable to those who would acquire speech-power. You will not realize the prize that you wish for languidly, but the goal that you start out to attain with the spirit of the old guard that dies but never surrenders, you will surely reach.

Your belief in your ability and your willingness to make sacrifices for that belief, are the double index to your future achievements. Lincoln had a dream of his possibilities as a speaker. He transmuted that dream into life solely because he walked many miles to borrow books which he read by the log-fire glow at night. He sacrificed much to realize his vision. Livingstone had a great faith in his ability to serve the benighted races of Africa. To actualize that faith he gave up all. Leaving England for the interior of the Dark Continent he struck the death blow to Europe's profits from the slave trade. Joan of Arc had great self-confidence, glorified by an infinite

capacity for sacrifice. She drove the English beyond the Loire, and stood beside Charles while he was crowned.

These all realized their strongest desires. The law is universal. Desire greatly, and you shall achieve; sacrifice much, and you shall obtain.

Stanton Davis Kirkham has beautifully expressed this thought: “You may be keeping accounts, and presently you shall walk out of the door that has for so long seemed to you the barrier of your ideals, and shall find yourself before an audience—the pen still behind your ear, the ink stains on your fingers—and then and there shall pour out the torrent of your inspiration. You may be driving sheep, and you shall wander to the city—bucolic and open-mouthed; shall wander under the intrepid guidance of the spirit into the studio of the master, and after a time he shall say, ‘I have nothing more to teach you.’ And now you have become the master, who did so recently dream of great things while driving sheep. You shall lay down the saw and the plane to take upon yourself the regeneration of the world.”

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. What, in your own words, is personality?
2. How does personality in a speaker affect you as a listener?
3. In what ways does personality show itself in a speaker?
4. Deliver a short speech on “The Power of Will in the Public Speaker.”
5. Deliver a short address based on any sentence you choose from this chapter.